AGOBARD OF LYON, EMPIRE, AND ADOPTIONISM

REUSING HERESY TO PURIFY THE FAITH

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ABSTRACT — *In the late eighth century, the heterodox movement Adoptionism emerged at the edge of the Carolingian realm. Initially, members of the Carolingian court considered it a threat to the ecclesiastical reforms they were spearheading, but they also used the debate against Adoptionism as an opportunity to extend their influence south of the Pyrenees. While they thought the movement had been eradicated around the turn of the ninth century, Archbishop Agobard of Lyon claimed to have found a remnant of this heresy in his diocese several decades later, and decided to alert the imperial court. This article explains some of his motives, and, in the process, reflects on how these early medieval rule-breakers (real or imagined) could be used in various ways by those making the rules: to maintain the purity of Christendom, to enhance the authority of the Empire, or simply to boost one's career at the Carolingian court.*

INTRODUCTION

If some rules are meant to be broken, others are only formulated once their existence satisfies a hitherto unrealized need. Unspoken rules are codified – and thereby become institutions – once they have been stretched to their breaking

1 Alan H. Goldman, "Rules and Moral Reasoning," *Synthese* 117 (1998/1999), 229-50; Jim Leitzel, *The Political Economy of Rule Evasion and Policy Reform* (London: Routledge, 2003), 8-23.

point and their existence is considered morally right or advantageous to those in a position to impose them.[1] Conversely, the idea that rules can be broken at all rests on the assumption that they reflect some kind of common interest; if unwanted rules are simply imposed on a group by an authority, conflict may ensue and be resolved along different mechanisms.[2] Codified behaviour thus demonstrates the existence of an almost paradoxical interplay between societal norms, perceived popular needs, and pastoral power.[3]

Regardless of whether regulations are created for conservative or progressive reasons, making or enforcing rules is a matter of social power, authority, and acknowledging them.[4] Authority is derived as much from the ability to act as a guarantor of order as from the visibility of that act; as such, the acceptance or rejection of rules also strengthens the bond between rulers and their subjects, and between subjects themselves.[5] Matters were no different during the Carolingian period.[6] It was a time when cultural ideas were reinvented, when courtly and ecclesiastical ideologies recombined into a political structure that, though hierarchical, aimed at fostering a collective sense of responsibility for the whole of Christendom.[7] Merely debating the limits of orthodoxy, thinking about the extent of certain rules, and attempting to enforce them, had become part of the pastoral duty of everybody in a position of authority.[8]

One of these people was Archbishop Agobard of Lyon (r. 816-839, d. 840), a colourful character with an interest in the consideration and reconsideration of rules.[9] After a short overview of his early career, this article highlights Agobard's attempts to bring attention to a heterodox movement several decades after it ceased to be a threat to the Carolingian Church. By explaining what this supposed heresy was about, the archbishop could reiterate what its existence meant for the Frankish Empire and how it was everyone's duty to ensure some rules remained unbroken. Thus, he participated in a context where debate was encouraged, and conflicts over orthodoxy were seen as part of a necessary discourse of authority, pastoral power, and imperial responsibilities.

2 Alan Segal, "Portnoy's Complaint and the Sociology of Literature," *The British Journal of Sociology* 22 (1971), 257-68; see also Warren C. Brown and Piotr Górecki, "What Conflict Means: The Making of Medieval Conflict Studies in the United States 1970-2000," in *Conflict in Medieval Europe: Changing Perspectives on Society and Culture*, eds. Warren C. Brown and Piotr Górecki (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003), 1-35.

3 John Forrester, "Foucault's Face: The Personal and the Theoretical," in *Foucault Now: Current Perspectives in Foucault Studies,* ed. James D. Faubion (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2014), 112-29.

4 Michael Mann, *The Sources of Social Power Volume 1: A History of Power from the Beginning to AD 1760* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), esp. 1-33, 301-40 and 373-415. On authority as "something more than power", see Frank Furedi, *Authority: A Sociological History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 1-16.

5 Alan H. Goldman, "The Rationality of Complying with Rules: Paradox Resolved," *Ethics* 116 (2006), 453-70; Robert Wuthnow, *Communities of Discourse: Ideology and Social*

Structure in the Reformation, the Enlightenment, and European Socialism (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), 1-22.

6 Mann, Sources of Social Power, 327-35; Thomas F. X. Noble, "Kings, Clergy and Dogma: The Settlement of Doctrinal Disputes in the Carolingian World," in *Early Medieval Studies in Memory of Patrick Wormald*, ed. Stepher Baxter et al. (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), 237-52, esp. 244-45 and 252; Ildar H. Garipzanov, *The Symbolic Language of Authority in the Carolingian World* (c. 751-877) (Leiden: Brill, 2008).

7 Giles Brown, "Introduction: The Carolingian Renaissance," in *Carolingian Culture: Emulation and Innovation*, ed. Rosamond McKitterick (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 1-51; Janet L. Nelson, "Charlemagne and Empire," in *The Long Morning of Medieval Europe: New Directions in Early Medieval Studies*, eds. Jennifer R. Davis and Michael McCormick (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), 223-34.

8 Irene van Renswoude, "License to Speak: The Rhetoric of Free Speech in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages" (PhD diss., Utrecht University, 2011), 137-73 and 259-83.

AGOBARD AND THE CAROLINGIAN CHURCH REFORMS

Hailing from the south of Aquitaine, a melting pot of Roman, Visigothic, Frankish, and other local identities, Archbishop Agobard emerged at the Carolingian court from a provincial, if not peripheral background.[10] Although Aquitaine was long seen as a region where Roman and early Christian traditions had persisted much more visibly than in other parts of the former Empire in the West, its integration into the Frankish sphere of influence, completed by 768, had resulted from hard-fought battles and skilful diplomatic manoeuvring, and occurred as the Carolingian frontiers were expanding both territorially and culturally.[11] Especially from the 780s onwards, the court around Charlemagne became the cultural, social, and political centre *par excellence*, from whence ever greater efforts were poured into all-encompassing ecclesiastical reforms (*correctio*).[12] Over the decades, liturgical and theological inconsistencies were debated, the behaviour of the clergy tested, and a grand endeavour to edit and explain the many books of the Bible undertaken.[13] The goal of all this was nothing less than the salvation of all the realm's subjects.[14] According to fundamental texts such as the *Admonitio generalis* (789) or the *Epistola de litteris colendis* (c. 781), bishops, counts, abbots, as well as the lowest parishioners, should have the tools to live well and thereby attain heaven.[15] Since 'knowing comes before doing', it stands to reason that education was key in achieving this.[16]

To ensure that *correctio* was properly orchestrated from the court, Charlemagne gathered a group of talented scholars and intellectuals from all over his realm and beyond, a practice continued by his son Louis the Pious (r. 814-840).[17] *Correctio* was a collective effort, and these courtiers were its standard-bearers, responsible for its implementation.[18] It was an honourable but heavy burden, and only the best and brightest were able to thrive in the court's competitive environment as it developed around the palace in Aachen.[19] For aspiring courtiers like Agobard of Lyon, it was of the utmost importance to show that he had what it took intellectually, and that he always had the Empire's best interests at heart.

This drive to prove himself absorbed much of Agobard's energy throughout his career. Peripheral or not, Agobard wanted his voice to be heard.[20] In part, this was a matter of principle. It was important for all prelates to show their active participation in the Carolingian *correctio* movement, as they had, over the years, established themselves as the prophetic "watchmen over the house of Israel", a phrase borrowed from Ezekiel 3:17, with Israel symbolically representing the Frankish Church.[21] Bishops were to seek out any errant sheep and bring them back into the fold, so as to protect the ecclesiastical herd. In addition to fulfilling this pastoral calling, Agobard hit the ground running in 816 when he was appointed bishop by his still-living predecessor Leidrad rather than elected by his colleagues or the Emperor.[22] This unconventional elevation to the prestigious See of Lyon prompted a debate about whether it should even be possible for a see to have two bishops.[23] While the matter was ultimately resolved by Leidrad's death later in 816, the circumstances regarding his rise to prominence may have made Agobard sensitive to the importance of correct ecclesiastical order, which influenced his sense of pastoral duty towards the Empire.

If anything, Agobard's career demonstrates his tenacity and intellectual prowess. He knew his strengths, and was aware that the way to the Emperor's ear was through his courtiers.[24] Despite the occasional misstep, such as an ill-timed sermon on church property on the occasion of Louis the Pious' first public penance at Attigny in 822, or backing the wrong horse during the 'crisis years' between Louis, his sons, and various groups of disgruntled aristocrats, the archbishop managed to create a niche by preaching ecclesiastical unity and purity to all who would hear it. In the process, he also framed his own place at the Carolingian court within the *ecclesia* it was building.[25]

Given this emphasis on the idea that Christianity should form a unified whole, it is no surprise that Agobard was interested in rules, their application, and those breaking them. He was, for example, particularly bothered by anyone in his

9 For a biography of Agobard, see Egon Boshof, *Erzbischof Agobard von Lyon: Leben und Werk* (Cologne: Böhlau, 1969).

10 Philippe Wolff, "L'Aquitaine et ses marges sous le règne de Charlemagne," in *Regards sur le Midi médiéval*, ed. Philippe Wolff (Toulouse: Privat, 1978), 20-67.

11 Marios Costambeys, Matthew Innes, and Simon MacLean, The Carolingian World (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 47-48 and 64-65; Eugen Ewig, "L'Aquitaine et les pays rhénans au Haut Moyen Âge," in *Eugen Ewig: spätantikes und fränkisches Gallien – Gesammelte Schriften (1952-1973)*, ed. Hartmut Atsma (Munich: Artemis, 1976), 553-72; Thomas F. X. Noble, "Louis the Pious and the Frontiers of the Frankish Realm," in *Charlemagne's Heir: New Perspectives on the Reign of Louis the Pious (814-840)*, eds. Peter Godman and Roger Collins (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), 333-47.

12 Percy Ernst Schramm, "Karl der Große: Denkart und Grundauffassungen – die von ihm bewirkte Correctio," *Historische Zeitschrift 198* (1964), 306-45.

diocese invoking 'Burgundian' law, which allowed for trial by combat, a practice that he found so distasteful that he composed two treatises against it.[26] More importantly, however, this multitude of laws contradicted the sacrifice made by Christ on the Cross in order to bring unity to the "circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian and Scythian, Aquitanian and Langobard, Burgundian and Alaman, slave and free".[27] A single law, he went on to argue, would bring the Empire one step closer to that ideal, and therefore Emperor Louis the Pious ought to make Salic Law the one definitive legal system. A universal framework, the Church, had been put in place to define sins, their spiritual consequences, and how to avoid them. Agobard advocated a similar institutional framework for those breaking worldly rules, so that divine and secular law would be brought closer together still, in accordance with his ideas about *correctio*.[28]

A similar rhetoric belied the treatises he produced against Jews. The continued existence of Jews in the so-called Christian Empire was a thorn in Agobard's side, and he frequently pursued the Emperor and his entourage with advice on which privileges Jews should be allowed to retain, or more importantly why they should be baptized.[29] It was on the first point especially that Agobard stood out. While a certain degree of anti-Jewish rhetoric is to be expected from early medieval ecclesiastical elites, it usually remained on a theological level.[30] By and large, Jews were tolerated and enjoyed considerable freedom and status under the Carolingians.[31] While converting to Judaism was generally frowned upon – as in the case of Bodo-Eleazar, a deacon who converted and moved to Spain – Jews were neither prosecuted, nor subjected to concerted conversion efforts.[32] This rubbed Agobard the wrong way, and he spent many a quill decrying their errors. Much to his frustration, however, this often fell on deaf ears at court.[33] Still, as with the multitude of legal options available in the Frankish realm, one of Agobard's primary concerns was the preservation of ecclesiastical unity.[34] As unpleasant as his vitriolic diatribes are to modern audiences, they should be – at least partially – understood as a defence of a Christendom that, he felt, remained beleaguered on all sides.[35] Agobard's agenda was pastoral. His duty

13 For a broad study see Rosamond McKitterick, *The Frankish Church and the Carolingian Reforms, 789-895* (London: Royal Historical Society, 1977). See also Thomas F. X. Noble, "The Monastic Ideal as a Model for Empire," *Revue Bénédictine* 86 (1976), 235-50; John Contreni, "Carolingian Biblical Studies," in *Carolingian Essays: Andrew W. Mellon Lectures in Early Christian Studies*, ed. Uta-Renate Blumenthal (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1983), 71-98; Geneviève Bührer-Thierry, "Le conseiller du roi: les écrivains carolingiens et la traduction biblique," *Médiévales* 12 (1987), 11-23.

14 Janet L. Nelson, "Religion in the Age of Charlemagne," in *The Oxford Handbook of Medieval Christianity,* ed. John H. Arnold (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 490-514; Mayke de Jong, "Charlemagne's Church," in *Charlemagne: Empire and Society*, ed. Joanna Story (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005), 103-36. "Admonitio generalis," in *MGH Fontes iuris Germanici antiqui in usum scholarum separatim editi 16: Die Admonitio generalis Karls des Großen*, eds. Hubert Mordek, Klaus Zechiel-Eckes, and Michael Glatthaar (Hannover: Hahn, 2012); "Epistola de litteris

was to educate people about the dangers of straying too far from the straight path, regardless of whether they were Jewish or Burgundian, proper sinners or simply ignorant of Christian teaching.[36]

To Agobard, Christian teaching on the proper way of life formed the basis of good behaviour, and the rules that emerged from the framework of imperial *correctio* provided Christians with everything they needed to lead proper Christian lives as explained by their pastors.[37] To break the rules was to hold a mirror to the system, to show the dangers of walking a different path. To Agobard, rules existed so that Christians could show their ability to weather the tribulations of earthly life without flinching. Parishioners and princes alike shared this burden. "Let him heed divine judgement", Agobard wrote in 833, reflecting on Louis the Pious' political troubles, "for nothing on this earth happens without a reason". "The Lord", he continued, quoting Job 12:24, "'changes the heart of the princes of the earth's people, and deceives them that they walk in vain where there is no way' […]. Therefore the Lord is terrible, not only to the people of the earth but also to the princes of those people".[38] According to Agobard, everyone ought to guard against worldly trouble, and rulers even more so, for their transgressions would have repercussions on an altogether grander, cosmological scale.[39]

It is in this context of *correctio* that we should regard one of Agobard's earlier works, which is the focus of the remainder of this article. It was written in or shortly after 818, two years after Agobard became Archbishop of Lyon, at a time when *correctio* was in full swing. More importantly, he began its composition in the same year that the primary rule-breaker against whom Agobard directed his energy had died. This treatise is titled *Adversum dogma Felicis* (Against the Teaching of Felix). The Felix in question had been the Bishop of Urgell, just south of the Pyrenees, who had spent his years from 799 until his death as an exile in Lyon in 818, accused of being that most heinous of transgressors: a heretic.[40]

colendis," in *MGH Capitularia regum Francorum 1*, ed. Alfred Boretius (Hannover: Hahn, 1883), 78-79.

16 "Epistola de litteris colendis," 79; Florence Close, *Uniformiser la foi pour unifier l'Empire. Contribution à l'histoire de la pensée politico-théologique de Charlemagne* (Brussels: Classe des Lettres, Académie royale de Belgique, 2011), 299-301.

17 Rosamond McKitterick, *Charlemagne: The Formation of a European Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 292-345.

18 Carine van Rhijn, "Priests and the Carolingian Reforms: The Bottlenecks of Local *Correctio*," in *Texts and Identities in the Early Middle Ages*, ed. Richard Corradini et al. (Vienna: Verlag der österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2006), 219-38; Carine van Rhijn, "Charlemagne and the Government of the Frankish Countryside," in *Law and Empire: Ideas, Practices, Actors,* ed. J. Duindam et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 157-76; Geneviève Bührer-Thierry, "Pensée hiérarchique et différenciation sociale: quelques réflexions sur l'ordonnancement des sociétés du haut Moyen Âge," in *Hiérarchie et stratification*

sociale dans l'Occident médiéval (400-1100), eds. Dominique Iogna-Prat, François Bougard and Régine Le Jan (Turnhout: Brepols, 2008), 363-90.

19 Claire Tignolet, "Jeux poétiques à la cour de Charlemagne: compétition et intégration," in *Agôn. La compétition Ve-XIIe siècle*, eds. François Bougard, Régine Le Jan and Thomas Lienhard (Turnhout: Brepols, 2012), 221-34; Stuart Airlie, "'For It Is Written in the Law': Ansegis and the Writing of Carolingian Royal Authority," in Baxter et al., *Early Medieval Studies*, 219-35.

20 In addition to Boshof, Stuart Airlie, "'I, Agobard, unworthy bishop'," in *Ego Trouble: Authors and Their Identities in the Early Middle Ages*, ed. Richard Corradini et al. (Vienna: Verlag der österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2010), 175-84, provides an insight into the mind of this bishop and his ambitions; Pierre Riché, "Les réfugiés wisigoths dans le monde carolingien," in *L'Europe héritière de l'Espagne wisigothique: colloque international du C.N.R.S. tenu à la Fondation Singer-Polignac* (Paris, 14-16 mai 1990), eds. Jacques Fontaine and Christine Pellistrandi (Madrid: Casa de Velazquez, 1992), 177-83.

ADOPTIONISM AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

Felix of Urgell was one of the main instigators of the Iberian variant of a heterodox movement more commonly known as Adoptionism, which emerged on the peninsula in the second half of the eighth century, right when the Carolingians were striving to consolidate their recently expanded frontiers and keep Umayyad incursions into their realm at bay.[41] This is partly why the Carolingians took an interest in this particular movement; it added a theological and pastoral challenge to their more worldly preoccupations with expanding and safeguarding their territories.[42]

This is not to say that the Carolingian intellectuals involved in this debate had a clear picture of what was going on. At the instigation of Pope Hadrian I (r. 772-795), through whom the Carolingian court first learned of this heterodoxy, it was thought that Adoptionism was a form of Nestorianism.[43] Based on early Eastern Christian teachings, this heresy proclaimed that Christ's nature was essentially bipartite: he was a 'natural' son of God and an 'adopted' one.[44] That was how the intellectuals at the court in Aachen, chief among them Alcuin of York, understood it; modern reinterpretations have pointed out that the controversy may have been rooted in the differing roles of patristic discourse on each side of the Pyrenees.[45] But the cat was out of the bag, and Felix, together with his colleague, Archbishop Elipandus of Toledo (c. 755-c. 808), was charged with misrepresenting the nature of the Trinity itself.[46]

Even if this *Hispanicus error* was based on a misunderstanding, it was nonetheless worthy of attention.[47] Such different views of Christ gnawed at the roots of their model Church, and should not be allowed to spread.[48] Moreover, Carolingian interest in this presumed heterodoxy allowed them to exert their influence over territories with Christian communities beyond their control. If the court was where correct practice was shaped, this practice should be exported to all subjects of the Empire; such was the pastoral zeal of those living in the *sacrum palatium* of the Frankish rulers.[49] Another problem was that these were

bishops propagating Adoptionist teachings, since this contravened the carefully cultivated self-image of the Carolingian episcopate, according to which there should be a divinely inspired and imperially formulated consensus about their responsibilities for the wellbeing of the Church both in this life and the next.[50] As such, it should involve someone who was *rex et sacerdos* – king and priest – at the same time.[51] Even Pope Hadrian acknowledged that his was a job for Charlemagne and his court.[52] As important as it was to nip Adoptionism in the bud from a theological point of view, it was equally important to incorporate the Spanish bishops into the Frankish community while doing so, as this would also enhance the power and prestige of the Carolingian court itself.[53] Taking the lead in combating heresy was not only about doctrinal uniformity, it was also a way to gain credibility as a Christian court, to show their subjects and neighbours alike that they had what it took to be good rulers.[54]

The multifaceted nature of this debate explains why so many Carolingian intellectuals became involved. Between the first appearance of Adoptionism on the Frankish scene and its final suppression at the turn of the ninth century, practically everyone who was anyone at court weighed in on this matter, by preaching, composing treatises, writing letters, or being present at the councils devoted to this movement held in 792, 794, and 799.[55] Important courtiers such as Alcuin, bishops and papal delegates including Paulinus of Aquileia, and monastic reformers such as Benedict of Aniane found increasingly interesting ways to convince their Iberian counterparts that they were errant sheep. They too seized the opportunity to fight for the greater good as much as they were out to strengthen their own position. These courtiers were vying for *Königsnähe*, a place close to the throne where their ideas and authority were heard and their involvement was visible.[56] By combating Adoptionism and chastising the supposed rule-breakers, they showed that they were willing to play by the rules.[57] They worked comfortably within the parameters set by the "most holy authority" of the court – personified by its ruler – through whose instruction, as Alcuin wrote, "the starving people who live in deserted places are sated with the catholic faith".[58]

21 Mayke de Jong, *The Penitential State: Authority and Atonement in the Age of Louis the Pious, 814-840* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 114-18; Mary Garrison, "The Franks as the New Israel? Education for an Identity from Pippin to Charlemagne," in *The Uses of the Past in the Early Middle Ages*, eds. Yitzhak Hen and Matthew Innes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 114-61.

22 Anna Beth Langenwalter, "Agobard of Lyon: An Exploration of Carolingian-Jewish Relations" (PhD diss., University of Toronto, 2009), 57-60.

23 Van Renswoude, "License to Speak," 299-300.

24 Airlie, "'I, Agobard'," 176; Philippe Depreux, "Lieux de rencontre, temps de négociation: quelques observations sur les plaids généraux sous le règne de Louis le Pieux," in *La royauté et les élites dans l'Europe carolingienne*, ed. Régine Le Jan (Lille: Centre d'Histoire de l'Europe du Nord-Ouest, 1998), 213–31, at 231; Philippe Depreux, "Hiérarchie et ordre au sein du palais: l'accès au prince," in Iogna-Prat, Bougard and Le Jan, *Hiérarchie et stratification*, 305-24.

On the other side, the Spanish bishops also engaged with their Frankish counterparts, in person and in writing, even though the outcome of the debate may have been pre-determined.[59] It is tempting to think they saw some advantages to this, too: debating the *fine fleur* of Carolingian intellectual life would not only give them credibility at a local level, but also allowed them to have their voice heard on a grander scale.[60] This they did with gusto. While defending their point of view, the Spanish bishops warned Alcuin against becoming a heretic and false advisor himself.[61] They admonished Charlemagne not to abuse his power like Constantine the Great, who also had Christianity's best interests at heart but ended up a sinner and heretic.[62] Going beyond doctrinal matters, these bishops even seized the opportunity to dispense appropriate political advice. It was an acceptable strategy. Both in his rebuttal to the Spanish bishops, and as a general part of court policy, Charlemagne – and his successors – fostered a climate where courtiers were allowed to criticize and admonish their rulers as long as they avoided outright invective.[63] Elipandus and Felix may have been accused of heresy, but they certainly were not breaking the rules of debate itself.

All things considered, the ensuing debates show the willingness of both parties to at least pretend to take their opponents seriously. The emergence of Adoptionism gave cause for Carolingian intellectual elites to defend their faith and establish consensus about the nature of the Trinity. It also enabled them to close their ranks and strengthen their own somewhat disparate community. By overstepping the boundaries of acceptable religious diversity, the Adoptionist bishops had handed the Carolingians a tool to build new religious norms that were previously unnecessary and unheard of.[64] In the process, they too became part of the ever-growing Carolingian *ecclesia*.

THE LEGACY OF FELIX

Although the actual Adoptionist movement had run out of steam by the start of the ninth century, it had not completely disappeared from the agenda for

25 Van Renswoude, "License to Speak", 295-316; De Jong, *Penitential State*, esp. 124-26 and 220-40; Courtney Booker, *Past Convictions: The Penance of Louis the Pious and the Decline of the Carolingians* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), 130-77. See also Steffen Patzold, "Eine 'loyale Palastrevolution' der 'Reichseinheitpartei'? Zur *Divisio Imperii* von 817 und zu den Ursachen des Aufstands gegen Ludwig den Frommen in Jahre 830," *Frühmittelalterliche Studien* 40 (2006), 43-77.

26 However, Janet L. Nelson, "Kingship and Empire," in *The Cambridge History of Medieval Political Thought c.350-c.1450*, ed. James H. Burns (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 211-52, at 213, points out that Agobard's proposed solution was equally impractical. See also Boshof, *Agobard*, 39, and Ian Wood, "Ethnicity and the Ethnogenesis of the Burgundians," in *Typen der Ethnogenese unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Bayern*, Teil 2, eds. Herwig Wolfram and Walter Pohl (Vienna: Verlag der österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1990), 54.

27 Agobard, "Adversus legem Gundobadi," 3: "circumcisio et preputium, barbarus et Scitha,

decades. Shortly after ascending to the imperial throne in 814, Louis the Pious was confronted with a resurgence of the Adoptionism issue around 818, in the midst of his attempts to continue his father's legacy.[65] The instigator of this renewed confrontation was the newly appointed Archbishop of Lyon, Agobard.

Agobard claimed that he had found a remnant of Adoptionist teachings among writings left by Felix after his death in 818, written in a "document of the genre of questions and answers".[66] Apparently, the Spanish bishop formally recanted his teachings, but had never given up his beliefs and, worse yet, may have convinced others with his arguments. Notably, Felix had managed to do this by leading an impeccable life, following the rules, and thereby deceiving his friends and admirers. This was cause for alarm, "for", as Agobard wrote, "they do not realize that faith is not measured by the life of a man, but that life is demonstrated through faith". No matter how much people played by the rules, they needed to internalize their faith in order to be open to *correctio*: "nobody will be saved who believes badly but lives well".[67] It was now Agobard's responsibility to aid those who had misinterpreted Felix's words "with which he went beyond the true faith", and to "oppose [these words] with the sentences of the Holy Fathers, so that whomever would deign to read this may realize that the surety of catholic truth is followed with the purest senses".[68] This is pastoral duty and Carolingian *correctio* at its finest: Agobard protecting those who do not know better, and teaching them "so that they may subtly correct their faith".[69] It is everyone's duty to help and teach each other, he writes, whereas those who are too proud of their own unblemished record to aid others in their struggles "will find fault with everybody in the community" and therefore "cannot please him, who said 'learn from me; I am gentle and humble of heart'" [Matt. 11:29].[70]

What follows is a systematic takedown of Felix's arguments, reconstructed from the booklet found by Agobard, combined with what he had been told.[71] Still assuming he was dealing with a kind of Nestorianism, Agobard presented a dossier of quotations from a large group of Greek and Latin Church Fathers. Although

Aquitanus et Langobardus, Burgundio et Alamannus, seruus et liber", in *Agobardi Lugdunensis opera omnia*, ed. Lieven van Acker, Corpus Christianorum Continuatio Medievalis 52 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1981), 20. Unless otherwise mentioned, all translations by Rutger Kramer.

28 Langenwalter, "Agobard," 66.

29 Langenwalter, "Agobard," 140-41 – these paragraphs summarize Langenwalter's argument made in the course of the entire thesis.

30 Johannes Heil, "Labourers in the Lord's Quarry: Carolingian Exegetes, Patristic Authority, and Theological Innovation, a Case Study in the Representation of Jews in Commentaries on Paul," in *The Study of the Bible in the Carolingian Era*, eds. Celia Chazelle and Burton van Name Edwards (Turnhout: Brepols, 2003), 75-95; but see by the same author, "Theodulf, Haimo, and Jewish Traditions of Biblical Learning: Exploring Carolingian Culture's Lost Spanish Heritage," in *Discovery and Distinction in the Early Middle Ages: Studies in Honour of John J. Contreni*, eds. Cullen J. Chandler and Steven Stofferahn (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2013), 103-34, on how Christian

it is unclear to what extent he based his arguments on earlier anti-Adoptionist treatises rather than his own research, he was sure to follow common Carolingian rules of debate. Among many other things, the Frankish bishops accused their Spanish colleagues of having gone beyond the teachings of the Fathers, as if they were not good enough. Agobard avoided this mistake by carefully teaching only those venerable certainties which had been proven by age.[72] He even went one step further: for him, the "sentences of the Holy Fathers" that should help his readers purify their faith were like a *regula* (rule), rather than mere guidelines.[73] Concluding this passage with an admonitory quotation from the Athanasian Creed that those who do not follow the catholic faith "shall doubtless perish everlastingly",[74] Agobard thus steered a course between persuasion and admonition, between what his intended audience should know, and what ought to be self-explanatory. He essentially reinforced religious normativity in the face of a supposedly heterodox movement, but he presented his argument as the confirmation of a rule and demonstration of the truth. For "it is the truth that is loved, not words", he writes, and that is why it was necessary to compose this work and to send it to the court.[75]

It is here that we see an ulterior motive to the *Adversum dogma Felicis*. This composition was not a sermon for the instruction of his diocese, nor was it intended for potential 'victims' of Felix. Agobard's refutation of Adoptionism was instead dedicated to Emperor Louis the Pious, who, as the intended recipient of the work, also appears as the model reader. While it was not unusual for the imperial court to patronize of this type of work, it also demonstrates Agobard's adherence to the Carolingian system, within which the ruler bore the greatest responsibility for teaching his Empire.[76] As explicated in its prologue, Louis the Pious was called upon to correct and approve of the *opusculum* Agobard composed against this "heresy, reused from the ancients".[77] The threat still lurked, and it was up to the Emperor to "recommend [Agobard's book] to those for whom it may be advantageous to read", that is, those who may have been affected by subversive teaching.[78] It is unclear whether those who had been

and Jewish intellectuals could also cooperate.

31 Bernard S. Bachrach, *Early Medieval Jewish Policy in Western Europe* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1977), 66-105.

32 Frank Riess, "From Aachen to al-Andalus: The Journey of Deacon Bodo (823–76)," *Early Medieval Europe* 13 (2005), 131-57.

33 Bat-Sheva Albert, "Christians and Jews," in T*he Cambridge History of Christianity Volume 3: Early Medieval Christianities, c.600-c.1100*, eds. Thomas F. X. Noble and Julia M. H. Smith (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 175, even assumes this was why Louis and Agobard "despised" each other.

34 See Cullen J. Chandler, "A New View of a Catalonian *Gesta contra Iudaeos:* Ripoll 106 and the Jews of the Spanish March," in Chandler and Stofferahn, *Discovery and Distinction*, 187-204, for similar ideas underlying another text corpus.

35 Jeremy Cohen, *Living Letters of the Law: Ideas of the Jew in Medieval Christianity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 136.

exposed to Felix's teachings were meant, or simply those whose faith needed to be refreshed. Agobard seized the occasion to explain, referencing Paul's letter to Titus, that "those who would want to be a priest 'must hold firmly to the truths which have tradition for their warrant; able, therefore, to encourage sound doctrine, and to show the wayward their error'" [1 Tim 1:9].[79] The statement is a double-edged sword: Agobard is reflecting on his own position as bishop, and emphasizes the expectation that he advise and help the Emperor run his realm, while also evoking Louis' own position as *rex et sacerdos* at the secular and ecclesiastical centre of the Empire. Presenting Louis with the tools to teach others about "the Son of God, who supports [his] *imperium*", Agobard subtly implied that by teaching others about Christ's true nature he would also strengthen his own position.[80]

It is unclear if Adoptionism remained a threat in 818. Although the appearance of the A*dversum dogma Felicis* so shortly after the death of Felix can hardly have been a coincidence, and despite persistant memories of the heterodoxy, it seems likely that Agobard oversold the importance of Felix's legacy, and used the memory of Adoptionism as a pretext for writing an educational text to the Emperor.[81] This makes sense from his perspective: he was a young prelate, out to make a name for himself, to demonstrate that his appointment to the archiepiscopacy had been deserved, and that he was part of the admonitory tradition of his predecessors.[82]

CONCLUSION

The debate about Adoptionism was not a matter of us versus them, or about a Church falling apart under the pressure of those unwilling to play by the rules.[83] The issue even brought the conflicting parties closer together, as the willingness to debate and the ability to communicate took precedence over conservatism and persecution.[84] The spectre of Adoptionism was used to strengthen the internal structure of the Carolingian Empire and to consolidate the authority

36 Bruce Eastwood, *Ordering the Heavens: Roman Astronomy and Cosmology in the Carolingian Renaissance* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 170-77; Alexander Murray, *Conscience and Authority in the Medieval Church* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 7-8.

37 An idea borrowed from Roger Teichmann, "Explaining the Rules," *Philosophy* 77 (2002), 597-613.

38 Agobard, "Liber apologeticus II," 12: "Cedat diuinis iudiciis, quia nihil in terra sine causa"; "'Qui inmutat cor principum populi terrę et decipit eos, ut frustra incedant per inuium.'[…] Ideo ergo terribilis Dominus, non tantum populis terrę, sed et ipsis principibus populi."

39 Rob Meens, "Politics, Mirrors of Princes and the Bible: Sins, Kings and the Well-Being of the Realm," *Early Medieval Europe* 7 (1998), 345-57.

40 See John C. Cavadini, *The Last Christology of the West: Adoptionism in Spain and Gaul, 785-820* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993) for a comprehensive overview of this debate. For Agobard's role in all this see Boshof, *Agobard*, 55-74.

of the Emperor as an educator of his people. Charlemagne involved himself because he had to meet an existing challenge to his *ecclesia*. Louis was called to arms to educate his people about potential dangers. As far as Agobard was concerned, this heterodoxy presented him with a prime opportunity to reinforce the rules he thought were worth reinforcing, to the benefit of the Emperor, his subjects, and himself.[85]

41 Cullen J. Chandler, "Heresy and Empire: The Role of the Adoptionist Controversy in Charlemagne's Conquest of the Spanish March," *The International History Review* 24 (2002), 505-27; Ann Christys, *Christians in al-Andalus* (711-1000) (Richmond: Curzon, 2002).

42 Christine Caldwell Ames, *Medieval Heresies: Christianity, Judaism, and Islam* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 126-30.

43 Wilhelm Heil, "Adoptianismus, Alkuin und Spanien," in *Karl der Grosse: Lebenswerk und Nachleben*, 5 vols., ed. Helmut Beumann et al. (Düsseldorf: Schwann, 1965-8), 2:95-154.

44 Langenwalter, "Agobard," 21-22.

45 Cavadini, *Last Christology*, 103-106.

46 Lauge O. Nielsen, "Trinitarian Theology from Alcuin to Anselm," in *The Oxford Handbook of the Trinity*, eds. Gilles Emery and Matthew Levering (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 155-56.

47 Alcuin, "Epistola 137," in *MGH Epistolae 4: Epistolae Karolini aevi II*, ed. Ernst

Dümmler (Berlin: Weidmann, 1899), 211; and "Epistola 200," 331. See Close, *Uniformiser la foi*, 164-68.

48 De Jong, "Charlemagne's Church," 127-28.

49 Mayke de Jong, "*Sacrum palatium et ecclesia*: l'autorité religieuse royale sous les Carolingiens (790-840)," *Annales: Histoire, Sciences Sociales* 58 (2003), 1243-69.

50 Steffen Patzold, "Bischöfe als Träger der politischen Ordnung des Frankenreichs im 8./9. Jahrhundert," in *Der frühmittelalterliche Staat: europäische Perspektiven*, eds. Walter Pohl and Veronika Wieser (Vienna: Verlag der österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2009), 255-68, or by the same author, *Episcopus: Wissen über Bischöfe im Frankenreich des späten 8. bis frühen 10. Jahrhunderts* (Ostfildern: Jan Thorbecke, 2008).

51 Arnold Angenendt, "Karl der Große als rex und sacerdos," in *Das Frankfurter Konzil von 794. Kristallisationspunkt karolingischer Kultur. Akten zweier Symposien (vom 23. bis 27. Februar und vom 13. bis 15. Oktober 1994) anläßlich der 1200-Jahrfeier der Stadt Frankfurt am Main*, ed. Rainer Berndt (Mainz: Gesellschaft für Mittelrheinische Kirchengeschichte, 1997), 255-78.

52 Close, *Uniformiser la foi*, 83-93; Michel Lauwers, "Le glaive et la parole: Charlemagne, Alcuin et le modèle du rex praedicator – notes d'ecclésiologie carolingienne," in *Alcuin de York à Tours. Écriture, pouvoir et réseaux dans l'Europe du haut Moyen Âge*, eds. Philippe Depreux and Bruno Judic (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2004), 221-44.

53 Karl F. Morrison, *The Two Kingdoms: Ecclesiology in Carolingian Political Thought* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1964), 68-98.

54 Roger Collins, "Charlemagne and His Critics," in Le Jan, *La royauté et les élites*, 193-211.

55 Matthias Kloft, "Der spanische Adoptianismus," in *794 – Karl der Große in Frankfurt am Main: Ein König bei der Arbeit*, ed. Johannes Fried (Sigmaringen: Thorbecke, 1994), 56-61.

56 Costambeys et al., *Carolingian World*, 276.

57 Leidulf Melve, *Inventing the Public Sphere: The Public Debate During the Investiture Contest (c. 1030-1122)* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 50-56.

58 "[…] per vos esurienti populo et in desertis locis habitanti ad satietatem catholice ministrentur". Alcuin, "Contra Felicem Urgellitanem episcopum libri VII," *Praefatio. Patrologia Latina* 101, ed. J. P. Migne (Paris, 1863), col. 128A.

59 Chandler, "Adoptionist Controversy", 520-21.

60 Christys, *Christians in Al-Andalus*, 14-27.

61 Elipandus, "Epistola ad Albinum," in *MGH Epistolae 4: Epistolae Karolini aevi II, ed. Ernst Dümmler* (Berlin: Weidmann, 1895), 302-3.

62 "Epistola episcoporum Hispaniae ad Karolum Magnum," in *MGH Concilia 2.1: Concilia aevi Karolini (742-817)*, ed. Albert Werminghoff (Hannover: Hahn, 1906), 121; see Eugen Ewig, "Das Bild Constantins des Großen in den ersten Jahrhunderten des abendländischen Mittelalters," *Historisches Jahrbuch* 75 (1955), 1-46; Walter Pohl, "Creating Cultural Resources for Carolingian Rule: Historians of the Christian Empire", in *Cultural Memory and the Resources of the Past in Early Medieval Europe*, eds. Clemens Gantner, Rosamond McKitterick and Sven Meeder (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 15-33.

63 De Jong, *Penitential State*, 112-47. See also Janneke Raaijmakers and Irene van Renswoude, "Guardians of Orthodoxy: Rulers and Religious Controversies in the Ninth Century," and Rutger Kramer, "Adopt, Adapt and Improve: Dealing with the Adoptionist Controversy at the Court of Charlemagne," both in *Religious Franks: Religion and Power in the Frankish Kingdoms – Essays in Honour of Mayke de Jong*, ed. Rob Meens et al. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, forthcoming 2016).

64 Raymund Kottje, "Einheit und Vielfalt des kirchlichen Lebens in der Karolingerzeit," *Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte* 76 (1965), 323-42, on the dynamics between local interests and unitary ideals.

65 Karl-Ferdinand Werner, "*Hludovicus Augustus*: gouverner l'empire chrétien – idées et réalités," in Godman and Collins, *Charlemagne's Heir,* 54-69.

66 Agobard, "Adversum dogma Felicis," 1, in Van Acker, *Agobardi opera omnia*, 74: "quedam scedula ab eo edita sub spetie interrogationis et responsionis".

67 Ibid., 2, 74: "nescientes quia non ex uita hominis metienda est fides, sed ex fide probanda est uita"; "nullus tamen male credens bene uiuendo saluatur".

68 Ibid., 1, 74: "in quibus a ueritate fidei excessit"; "sanctorum patrum sententias opponere, ut quisquis dignatus fuerit legere, agnoscat, qua cautela catholicae ueritatis purissimum sensum sequatur".

69 Ibid., 1, 74: "ut fidem suam subtilissime corrigant."

70 Ibid., 2, 74-75: "omnibus tamen in commune detrahunt"; "non possunt illi placere, qui dixit: 'Discite a me, quia mitis sum et humilis corde'".

71 Ibid., 6, 77.

72 "Epistola episcoporum Franciae": "Et quare aliquid confirmare audemus, quod in illorum non inveniatur scribtis?", Werminghoff, *MGH Conc.* 2.1, 143.

73 Agobard, "Adversum dogma Felicis," 3, 75: "sanctorum patrum sententias".

74 Ibid., 3, 75: "absque dubio in aeternum peribit".

75 Ibid., 3, 75: "ueritas amanda est, non uerba".

76 Rosamond McKitterick, "Royal Patronage of Culture in the Frankish Kingdoms under the Carolingians: Motives and Consequences," in Centro italiano di Studi sull'Alto Medioevo, *Committenti e produzione artistico-letteraria nell'alto medioevo occidentale* (Spoleto: Presso La sede del Centro, 1992), 93-129.

77 Agobard, "Adversum dogma Felicis," Prologue, 73 : "ex ueteri rediuiuam heresim".

78 Ibid., Prologue, 73: "Quia, si probatur, illis, quibus profuturum est, ad legendum commendatur; si autem improbatur, auctor eius per uos emendatur". See also Van Renswoude, "License to Speak," 299-303.

79 Ibid., Prologue, 73: "Sacerdotem quoque esse uult 'amplectentem eum, qui secundum doctrinam est, fidelem sermonem, ut potens sit exhortari in doctrina sana, et eos, qui contradicunt, arguere'".

80 Ibid., Prologue, 73: "Filii Dei, qui uestrum iuuat imperium".

81 For example in Ardo Anianensis, "Vita sancti Benedicti Abbatis Anianensis," c. 8, ed. and trans. Gerhard Schmitz et al., www.rotula.de/aniane/.

82 Van Renswoude, "License to Speak," 30.

83 Carl T. McIntire, "Transcending Dichotomies in History and Religion," *History and Theory: Theme Issue 45 – Religion and History* 45 (2006), 80-92.

84 Rutger Kramer and Irene van Renswoude, "Dissens, Debatte und Diskurs: Kirche und Imperium in der Karolingerzeit," *Historicum 31, Themenschwerpunkt Visions of Community* (2014), 22-27.

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